The Christian News-Letter

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No. 153 SEPTEMBER 30TH, 1942

DEAR MEMBER,

What concern has the Christian News-Letter with the Indian situation? Certainly not to advocate a particular political solution, since Christians as such have no superior knowledge or wisdom to enable them to arrive at a sounder political judgment than others, though their faith should at least save their judgment from being clouded by self-interest. Our concern is rather to discover, so far as we can, the religious meaning beneath the surface of political events.

IMPASSE IN INDIA

The inexplicable and arresting fact in what has happened in recent months is the failure of the Cripps mission. However late in the day, this country acted in the spirit of a large-minded statesmanship. Compelled by danger to a big decision, it gave fresh, unequivocal proof of its fundamental belief in political liberty, which has been perhaps its most distinctive and notable contribution to the history of mankind. It was peculiarly fortunate in its ambassador. Aided by his previous connections with India, Sir Stafford Cripps succeeded in establishing in an unprecedented degree direct, open and sympathetic relations with the leaders of Indian opinion. His frank acceptance of the implications of the British Government's declaration went far to dissolve the long-standing doubts about the sincerity of British intentions. The common danger from a common foe, the detestation felt by educated Indians for Nazi doctrines and their sympathy with Russia and China were powerful forces that might have been expected to facilitate an agreement.

Yet in spite of all this the negotiations broke down. It is easy to enumerate factors which contributed to this, and to apportion blame in this quarter and in that. Yet none of the immediate causes seem adequate to account for the failure. When everything has been said by way of explanation we are left with some unaccountable, irrational, untoward element that frustrated all attempts at understanding.

The failure was a signal defeat of liberal ideas, which have in the past held sway over the minds of Indians as well as of British. The forces of reason, conciliation, persuasion and good-will proved unavailing.

The causes of the break-down must be sought at a deeper level than is commonly taken into account. The following passage in a letter from one of our members who has an intimate and life-long knowledge of India gets near to the heart of the matter.

"For nearly fifty years from the 'Mutiny' period onwards I see the relationship as one governed, on the whole, by mutual respect based on a recognition of Britain's duty to India and a faith, on India's part, in Britain's loyalty to that duty. The Queen's Proclamation of 1858 was the charter of that relationship, and it rested upon religious and moral principles on both sides. In my early years in India the Queen's Proclamation was often quoted with pride by Indians, and references by Englishmen to the guidance of India as a task committed to us by Providence were quite sincerely meant.

" In recent times we know that the conviction of a moral order to which affairs of State have to conform has been gradually fading and power-politics have been taking its place—and that not only in Germany. The older political leaders in India, such as Ranade and Gokhale, were theists and based their political policy on justice and honour. A change of political atmosphere came about when these two old leaders broke with B. G. Tilak and the Congress of to-day began to emerge—irreconcilable and ' realist.' Mr. Gandhi is not easy to place in any class but he belonged, at first at least, to the older group. What he said of Tilak some twenty years ago will illustrate what I mean. Tilak, he said, ' used to challenge my view of life and bluntly would say truth and untruth were only relative terms, but at the bottom there was no such thing as truth or untruth just as there was no such thing as life or death.' We cannot censure the leaders of to-day for such an attitude for we have shared in it ourselves and helped to create it in them."

Judged by the ordinary standards of history Britain has done a good job in India. As one who has many and long links with India through my forbears, both direct and by marriage, who have had a share in its service, I should be among the last to belittle what has been accomplished. The failure of Britain has lain in conceiving the task in too exclusively political and administrative terms.

Faced in India with two great rival religions and cultures the only course for the British Government seemed to be to adopt an impartial and aloof attitude to both and, as part of this impartiality, an attitude of detachment towards its own traditional faith. In accordance with the prevailing tendencies of the nineteenth century the true policy of religious toleration inspired by religious respect for human freedom degenerated into a colourless neutrality, which could be interpreted as indifference to the deeper issues of life. The result has been that the meeting between India and Britain has been in the main on the material plane. The education provided by the Government opened up avenues of employment and created aptitudes of criticism, but made hardly any contact with the powerful influences of tradition, custom and the home. The earlier hold of Great Britain on India was due in large measure to the attractive power of a political faith rooted in a religious view of the world ; but the necessity of understanding and intercourse at the deeper cultural and religious levels was not realized, and with the growing secularisation of both the Indian and the Western mind the possibilities of a genuine understanding became more and more remote.

However much the British attitude in the past and present may have contributed directly and indirectly to the existing impasse, it is a profound misunderstanding of the actual situation to suppose, as many people do, more particularly in America, that all that is needed to end the deadlock is some action by the British Government. It is precisely the obstacles on the British side to an understanding that have, at any rate in principle, been removed. India has been offered full independence in a declaration which, as the Prime Minister has recently re-affirmed, represents " the settled policy of the British Crown and Parliament," and the principles of which " stand in their full scope and integrity." This includes, as Sir Stafford Cripps explicitly stated in his discussions in India, the right of the Indian Union, when formed, to secede from the British Commonwealth of Nations. The difficulty of granting the Indian demand for a national government *now* does not lie with the British Government. It arises from the inability of Indians to agree among themselves. It is the existence within India of cleavages so deep that the possibility of civil war is openly discussed, that makes it impossible to set up a national government with sufficient united public support to carry on the government of the country in an hour of extreme peril.

The more we reflect on the situation, the more its *tragic* character is impressed on us. Great Britain has made one of the greatest offers in its history, and is more hated than it has ever been. The Hindu and Mohammedan communities, instead of being drawn nearer to one another by a common danger fatal to the aspirations of both, are more bitterly divided than before.

There is no way out of the impasse which does not begin by acknowledging its reality. The Secretary of State for India was quite right in maintaining that there are situations in which negotiations are useless. For the Government to yield to the solicitations of well-meaning persons to take some further action in line with ideas which have already proved themselves bankrupt might only make the situation worse. Without the introduction of some new factor which changes the whole setting of the question the positions of the different parties cannot be reconciled.

Faced with a baffling situation, the Christian mind turns naturally to prayer. This is not to believe that there is some magical means of reconciling irreconcilable standpoints. It is the confidence that in worship, and in the humility that is born of worship, new patterns of action may reveal themselves which will make it possible for the task to be taken in hand afresh at a deeper level and in more promising ways. In prayer we are reunited with the living and creative forces of the universe ; " the edge of the tool of the will is restored, and it is eager for world-making."

INTEGRATION

The Secretary of State for India in the debate said that " we wanted India to be free and to take her place in the wonderful partnership of the British Commonwealth of Nations, which he thought was destined to play an even greater part in the world in future years than it had done in the past." He spoke of " the substratum of unity " still existing between Indians and ourselves, and expressed the hope that at some not distant time " Indians might be able to agree on a free constitution under which they could develop the great natural resources of India and the great gifts of her people." Here we are on the solid ground of given realities—natural resources, natural gifts, an already existing sub-stratum of unity, an already existing partnership of nations.

If the partnership of the British Commonwealth can properly be described as wonderful, as in one sense it undoubtedly can, it is because its peoples have succeeded by the grace of God in building up relations of mutual respect and mutual trust between persons and groups bound together under a common rule of law. It can play greater part in the future than in the past only by taking a firmer hold of these principles and extending them to wider fields.

The Supplement to News-Letter No. 132 contained an exposition of Miss Follett's principle of integration as applied to industry. Integration is the achievement of a new whole, which transcends previously existing standpoints by including the element of truth in each. More recently Professor Grisebach has reminded us that society alone is real, and that no party to a discussion can claim that its point of view represents the whole and final truth. The subject of a notable recent volume, *The New Leviathan*,[1] by R. G. Collingwood, is the revolt of barbarism against civilization, which seems to him " the most conspicuous thing going on at the present time." Civilization means in his view to refrain from using force against men, to respect their freedom of choice, to settle questions not by fighting but by discussion leading to agreement by the reconciliation of different points of view. Civilization is continually threatened by barbarism, which is the attempt to settle questions by fighting, and has to be restrained by force, but always by force used for the sake of civilization, i.e. to create the conditions in which further advances in civilization are possible.

The future relations between Great Britain and India will depend on how far this country can convince Indians that it is seeking a genuine integration and a partnership based on real equality. It is idle to minimize the difficulty of this task. Old habits are hard to shed, and there is a legacy from the past of mistrust and bitterness which only the most persistent effort can remove. It is essential to dispel from Indian minds the

[1] Clarendon Press, Oxford. £1. 15s.

idea that differences are to be judged at the bar of what we ourselves understand to be true and right. The Prime Minister was right in maintaining that there are powerful minorities in India who would never consent to be ruled by Congress, but the " loud and prolonged cheers " which followed his further declaration, " Nor shall they ever be, against their will, so subjugated," were not the utterance of those striving for integration, but the uncompromising assertion of the purpose, even though it be a worthy purpose, of one of the parties concerned.

But while the task of integration demands a far-reaching change of outlook and a discipline and perseverance beyond our present capacity, it is one from which we must not shrink. It is indeed the task of civilization itself. The relations between this country and India have an importance that cannot be exaggerated, because they have been the chief meeting ground of East and West. In the outcome of these relations, more than in any other field, will be determined the momentous question whether the ideas of Nazi racialism—which the United Nations are resisting, but from the infection of which they are not themselves free—will gain the ascendancy in human affairs, or whether a large step forward will be taken in the realization of the conceptions of life which have inspired what is best in our political tradition. The latter result will come about only if we set ourselves to act in accordance with them not only in moments of crisis, as in the Cripps mission, but consistently, patiently and uninterruptedly because we know them to be the ultimate truth of life.

FRENCH PROTESTANTS AND THE DEPORTATIONS OF JEWS

I quoted last week strong protests by Roman Catholics against the treatment of Jews in France. The text has now reached London of a letter addressed to Marshal Pétain by Pastor Marc Boegner, the President of the Protestant Federation of France. After recalling an earlier protest made by the same body in June and describing the measures, in face of which " no Frenchman can remain unmoved," and the inhuman conditions " which shock the most hardened consciences," he appeals in the name of the Council of the Protestant Federation to the Marshal to use his high authority " to order the introduction of absolutely different methods in the treatment of foreigners of the Jewish race, whether baptized or not . . . . and to dictate the indispensible measures in order that France may not inflict upon herself a moral defeat of incalculable weight."

Yours sincerely,

J. H. Oldham

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THE CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER, 19 DEAN'S YARD, WESTMINSTER, LONDON, S.W. 1.

Published by Dr. J. H. Oldham for the Council on the Christian Faith and the Common Life, and printed by the Church Army Press, Cowley, Oxford.